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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the correlation between ACT scores and grade point average for Mexican-American students. Specifically, it compares the first semester grades of 32 Mexican-American students (Group I) and 32 non-Mexican-American students (Group II) who had comparable economic need and comparable scores on the ACT. Only students who completed the first college semester were included in the study. In comparing the first semester grades of Group I and Group II it was found that there was a significant correlation between ACT scores and GPA for both groups. The author concludes that (1) ACT scores are a reasonably satisfactory predictor of initial academic success for Mexican-Americans as well as non-Mexican-Americans; and (2) students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are sufficiently similar, regardless of ethnic background. (Author/HMV)

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ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY GRANT RECIPIENTS

A Research Article

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ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY GRANT RECIPIENTS

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Since the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, there has been increasing effort to raise the standard of living of economically deprived groups in the United States. One of the basic ways this goal has been pursued is by providing greater opportunities for educational achievement at all levels of schooling.

Research on the Mexican-American has been meager and only recently has great concern been shown for his unique problems in obtaining an education.

> Historically, education has been the means whereby subgroups have improved their conditions and opportunities in this country. The Mexican-American in the United States, and particularly in the Southwest, is no exception. While it would be in error to assume that all Mexican-American students experience difficulty and that little progress has been made in removing educational deficiencies for them, the truth is that the Mexican-American remains low in educational achievement. Despite efforts from many fronts, he remains, as a cultural subgroup with the additional burden of language handicap, less able to profit from public school programs when he enters and becomes progressively less able to compete as he progresses through its lockstep organization.[1]

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[1]Owen L. Caskey, "Guidance Needs of Mexican American Youth, (Proceedings of the First Invitational Conference, Texas Technological College, Lubbock, Texas, November 10, 1967), p. 6. (ERIC: ED 036347, Microfiche.)

The Mexican-American shares with a large portion of the non-Mexican-American population lower class income and status. However, he is unlike other lower-class persons because he has a different culture. This point has great importance to guidance counselors and educators, but it is one that has not been sufficiently acknowledged or investigated.

At College of the Desert, a public two-year community college in Palm Desert, California, the American College Test (ACT) is required of all entering full-time freshmen students. One purpose of administering this test is to aid the counselors in helping the student select an appropriate program. Mexican-Americans, coming from low income families, have presented unusual problems to the counselor because their ACT scores often do not indicate their actual potential for success in college.

Since the purpose of administering the ACT is to aid in counseling and advising, it seems desirable to determine the correlation between ACT scores and grade point average (GPA) for these Mexican-American students.

Today's poverty level student has attained college entrance largely due to the Educational Opportunity Grant (EOG). Studies of his poorer background, his performance and adjustment have been inconclusive (Schroeder & Sledge, 1966). From their own research, Schroeder and Sledge suggested that personal or motivational factors may be more important determinants of college achievement than the socio-economic level of the parents; however, in one study (Astin, 1964) it was found that the majority of

dropouts from college came from the lower of the socio-economic groups attending college. Another study (Brown and Russell, 1964) found that disadvantaged students had abilities that far exceeded their performance on college entrance tests.

Cultural differences, bilingualism, attitudinal, and motivational factors of Mexican-Americans are brought into focus by Stewart, Dole and Harris (1967); Spolsky (1969); Gardner and Lambert (1959); and Rodriguez (1969). These studies point up the difficulty bilingual students have with tests. Reasons range from lack of test taking sophistication to lack of understanding the language in which the test is given.

A number of factors appear to affect predictability of college grades: (a) variation in range of talent (Munday, 1970); (b) the greater predictability of academic achievement among girls than among boys (Munday, 1970); (c) personality characteristics, such as maladjustment and compulsiveness (Malnig, 1964; Lin and McKeache, 1970); (d) low predictability of community-controlled junior colleges where few students live in college housing (Munday, 1970).

Other dimensions of relationships among nonacademic accomplishment, academic potential, and academic accomplishment have been studied by: (Holland, 1961; Holland & Astin, 1962; Holland & Nichols, 1964; Richards, Holland & Lutz, 1967; Richards & Lutz, 1968). Their findings

indicate that nonacademic accomplishment can be assessed with moderate reliability, that both academic and nonacademic accomplishment can be predicted to a useful degree, and that nonacademic accomplishment is largely independent of academic potential and achievement.

Studies have shown that the ACT has reliability and validity (American College Testing Program, 1965; Munday 1965). However, in Buros (1965), reviewer, Max D. Engelhart, pointed out a possible limitation of ACT:

> The emphasis on generalized school-learned abilities seems to be a legitimate compromise, although one can regret possible injustice to students more capable of nonverbal reasoning than of reasoning in verbal symbols.[1]

Another researcher (Humphreys, 1968) found that ACT had useful validity in predicting grades of entering freshmen, but its prediction value diminishes the longer a student is in college.

A study of 36 freshmen male students that received financial aid under the Federal Work-Study Program at University of North Dakota and Bismark Junior College were compared with a control group that had the same composite ACT scores (Bradfield, 1967). The students' GPA at the end of a year suggested that students from lower-socio-economic backgrounds are sufficiently similar to college students in general.

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[1]Oscar Krisen Buros, (ed.), The Sixth Mental Measurement Yearbook, (Highland Park: The Gryphon Press, 1965), p. 3.

The present study will compare the first semester grades of Mexican-American and non-Mexican-American students who had comparable economic need and comparable scores on the ACT.

METHOD AND RESULTS

A group of 32 Mexican-American (Group I) and a second group of 32 non-Mexican-American (Group II) students were chosen to participate in this study. All were first-semester students at College of the Desert. These students had severe economic need, as evidenced by their eligibility for the Educational Opportunity Grant (following current federal guidelines for eligibility). For the purpose of this study, all Mexican-American students in Group I were chosen on the basis of their Spanish surnames. Non-Mexican-Americans in Group II were those EOG recipients who did not have Spanish surnames. Students were matched according to composite scores on the ACT.

The first semester grades of students in Group I and Group II were taken from the records in the Registrar's office. Only students who completed the first semester were included in the study. A few students who received the EOG dropped out before the first semester's work was completed. It seems reasonable to assume that the students who dropped out of college did so partly because of unsatisfactory scholastic achievement. However, this is just conjecture and cannot be measured.

The GPA were obtained from grades received by students at the end of the Fall and Spring semesters, 1966-1970 academic years. To compute a scholastic average for each student for whom grades were available, an A was assigned a value of 4; a B of 3; a C of 2; a D of 1; and an F of 0. All the courses taken and for which grades were received were included when the GPA was computed. The number of units carried by students varied, and no attempt to assess instructors' criteria for grades was made.

In comparing the first semester grades of Group I and Group II it was found that there was a significant correlation between ACT scores and GPA for both groups. The coefficient for Group I was .32 and coefficient for Group II was .41. It seems that a reliance on ACT scores is a reasonably satisfactory predictor of freshmen grades at College of the Desert. The difference existing between Groups I and II was non-significant (t= .0009), and the conclusion that the ACT is a good predictor of initial academic success for Mexican-Americans as well as non-Mexican-Americans seems valid.

Other variations were noted between male and female performance in both groups; the female students in both groups tended to have a higher GPA than males with the same ACT scores.

The amount of EOG did not seem to be a factor determining GPA, nor did it seem to have any definite relationship

to scores on the ACT.

TABLE I

ANALYSIS OF FIRST SEMESTER GPA EARNED BY STUDENTS

	GPA Averages
Group I Mean	2.36
Group II Mean	2.52

TABLE II

ACT SCORES OF SELECTED EOG RECIPIENTS

	*Composite Scores
Group I Mean	15.59
Group II Mean	15.88

*Scores in both groups were matched within 1.0 of each other.

For community college guidance personnel, the results suggest that students from lower socio-economic background are sufficiently similar and that no big changes are needed in the college program to accomodate them.

The next step would be to investigate the predictability of ACT scores and college grades at College of the Desert for Mexican-American and non-Mexican-American students by correlating selected test scores on the ACT with grades in separate subject-matter fields and areas such as social studies, mathematics, and English.

TABLE III

GROUP I (MEXICAN-AMERICAN)
ACT SCORES AND GPA

Student	ACT	GPA
1. C.D.	24	3.02
2. E.A.	22	3.42
3. C.M.	22	2.54
4. S.C.	22	2.44
5. V.D.	20	2.07
6. V.V.	20	2.76
7. C.R.	20	2.14
8. R.R.	19	1.81
9. M.C.	19	2.08
10. R.V.	19	2.72
11. D.R.	19	3.00
12. J.M.	19	2.72
13. R.C.	18	1.95
14. C.R.	18	2.45
15. F.E.	16	2.00
16. J.P.	15	1.52
17. L.V.	15	2.95
18. M.A.	15	1.65
19. D.G.	15	3.00
20. A.M.	15	3.69
21. J.Q.	14	1.00
22. A.V.	14	2.24
23. M.A.	14	3.15
24. D.C.	13	2.42
25. J.D.	12	1.57
26. J.C.	11	2.12
27. C.A.	10	1.75
28. D.H.	10	2.69
29. G.V.	9	2.00
30. G.C.	8	1.45
31. I.M.	7	2.05
32. G.A.	5	3.00

TABLE IV

GROUP II (NON-MEXICAN-AMERICAN)
ACT SCORES AND GPA

Student	ACT	GPA
1. A.B.	24	2.60
2. T.F.	22	3.63
3. J.S.	22	3.22
4. R.T.	21	2.87
5. J.C.	21	3.00
6. G.K.	20	3.17
7. R.G.	20	2.00
8. R.O.	20	1.78
9. L.S.	19	3.09
10. D.W.	19	3.60
11. M.A.	19	2.69
12. J.D.	19	2.75
13. D.Y.	18	2.37
14. N.L.	18	2.36
15. L.M.	16	1.55
16. G.F.	16	2.19
17. T.E.	16	1.64
18. P.L.	16	2.65
19. L.W.	15	2.22
20. P.C.S.	15	2.80
21. P.S.	14	3.38
22. D.S.	14	2.35
23. C.B.	14	2.11
24. G.S.	14	3.66
25. S.F.	12	2.00
26. D.L.	11	2.80
27. S.R.	11	2.64
28. R.T.	10	2.20
29. E.A.	10	1.27
30. L.H.	8	2.00
31. E.S.	7	1.78
32. M.E.	6	2.37

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